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USACE, MiTT Work to Improve Iraqi Army, Base

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The 8th Iraqi Army, headquartered in the Babil Province, enjoys new barracks, latrines and a motor pool among other improvements thanks to the combined efforts of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Babil Resident Office (BRO), a contractor from Amman, Jordan, and the Military Training Team (MiTT) from the 425th Brigade Special Troops Battalion (Airborne), 4th Bde. Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division.

Gary Jones, BRO construction representative, said that the \$1.3 million project for the 2nd Bde., 8th Iraqi Army Div., and the \$900,000 improvements for the adjoining 2nd Bn., are 87 percent complete.

"We started these projects in December 2005," he said. "At the battalion compound we built an addition to the medical clinic, a building with four classrooms and a water tank capable of holding 100 cubic meters of water."

Jones added that, in addition to the barracks facility on the brigade compound, the contractor built a dining facility, a guardhouse, guard tower, a motor pool and a large generator to provide electricity while an electrical upgrade was being done for the brigade.

"The utilities and services that would be provided by the city are not generally there so we had to do site work that wouldn't normally be done," said Maj. Kevin Stoll, Babil resident engineer.

"Because generally there is not enough power in the city, nor is it reliable, so we have install generators. Because there is no sewer system to tie into, we had to make a leech field. That's how they do it here. And the water system is not reliable and does not have enough pressure so we had to build a pump and storage tank so they have reliable water."

Road networks were crude within the compound housing the brigade and the battalion; being gravel and mud or nonexistent.

The existing infrastructure was decrepit and it took a lot of time to bring it up to speed before beginning the actual projects, said Stoll.

"There was a lot of standing water that had to be removed," he said. "We have been working nonstop since that time November 2005 until we got this projects finished. We have also had a couple of contract modifications that have delayed us, but we really have done well considering the shape these facilities were in."



Representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Resident Office and the MiTT from the 425th Brigade Special Troops Battalion (Airborne), 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division examine the new motor pool facility at the 8th Iraqi Army base. [USACE PHOTO by Betsy Weiner]



Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 8th Iraqi Army begin to march for review in the motor pool area that was built because of the efforts of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Gulf Region South District, Babil Resident Office. [USACE PHOTO by Betsy Weiner]

"We haven't had too many instances where the contractor has been threatened," he said. "The general contractor is from Am Jordan, so one of the problems we do have periodically is communication because they do not maintain a local presence. There are several layers of subcontractors and that has some management implications as far as operating smoothly – getting word back people on the ground – because of no direct line of communication."

Hoffmeister said communications have improved since the MiTT co-located with the BRO at the Regional Embassy Compound in Al Hillah.

"Task Force Warrior (Soldiers) has developed a close working relationship where we work together to achieve a common end for the people of Al Hillah," he said.

"By maintaining awareness of each unit's activities and projects, we don't duplicate efforts and we share information about the situation and how to best achieve our goals given the challenging interpersonal dynamics of working with the local Iraqi leaders. We have been able to extend our capability to leverage projects in our area by working with Maj. Stoll and Lt. Cmdr. Hartman (USACE representative to the Babil Provincial Reconstruction Team) to develop scopes of work and properly (perform) QA/QC (quality assurance/ quality project execution)," Hoffmeister said.

Another milestone reached, Jones said, was working with all the entities involved with the projects, despite several changes in commands in the Iraqi Army's 2nd Bn., 8th Bde.

"When the players change, the focus changes," Jones said. "We always get different list of things that take priority when that (the request) is within the scope of the contract or something we can easily do, we'll just go ahead with it. But not all wishes are met."

Jones said the projects have come together well, and that the construction quality measures up and even exceeds the average construction quality in Iraq.

"They are going to get decent facilities that will stand up I think to what they were intended to provide," he said. "For example, extra money was left over from the MNSTC-I (Multinational Security Transitional Command-Iraq) pot, we were able to get a (cost) modification on each compound to connect it to the (national power) grid, and in fact, to the emergency (power) grid, which means even when parts of the city are shut down electrically they should stay on line. This will be a great quality of life for the soldiers."

He added that from an operational maintenance standpoint, power surges – each time the power kicks off and on – wear out electrical equipment – and the compound's should last longer as a result of being connected to the emergency power grid.

"The (Iraqi) military guys are very appreciative," Jones said. "And we have a great relationship with the (military) transitional team here. We get feedback from them as far as what the (Iraqi's) military's plan is."

Maj. Marc Hoffmeister, MiTT team, said the long-term impacts of Corps' projects are a key to the success of the team's mission.

The infrastructure available to the Iraqi Army was minimal at best and with the mud conditions of Iraq's winter, the lack of underground and overhead cover, everything was a challenge.

"Poor sewage and limited barracks impacts the quality of life and self-esteem of an Iraqi soldier," he said.

"As an engineer officer serving on a MiTT team, I greatly appreciate the unity of effort between the U.S. Army Corps and my team's efforts to advance the capability of the Iraqi Army. While it is a challenge to train the (soldiers) around the project, it is a worthwhile inconvenience for a necessary term improvement," Hoffmeister said.

Jones said security at the site poses additional challenges, particularly when the site is close down for periods of time because of considered treacherous due to insurgent activities, or when they were blocked by an attack or warning.

and intentions are, and we have more direct communication with the commander than before.”

Hoffmeister agreed with Jones and said, “The Iraqis don’t differentiate a lot between the different units involved in supporting the brigade. They assume a close linkage between the Corps and any other coalition Soldier they come in contact with simply because we share the uniform. Because we have such a tight working relationship between the MiTT and the Corps, this is essentially true. Changes to project scope or additional project requests by the Iraqis are usually addressed to the MiTT team and we in turn coordinate with the Corps project officer.”

Hoffmeister noted that the Iraqi Army is improving daily and that he greatly admires the work ethic and patriotism of “these fine soldiers. Before deploying, we were briefed that the Iraqis took extended vacations and worked only half days, and a litany of other comments. While their work habits are a bit different than in our Army, I’ve found this theme to be flat wrong,” he said.

He added that the unit operates at near full capacity six days a week (Friday is reduced manning for the holy day), and that soldiers divide their time off so that an Iraqi staff section representative is always available.

“They are always a phone call away and are more than willing to grab their weapons, jump in the truck and execute a raid at a moments notice...an event that we’ve done with my unit frequently, as actionable intelligence suddenly develops enough to initiate an operation against an AIF (anti-Iraqi forces) target,” Hoffmeister said.

“As we go into the (post-Hajj celebration) this year, what is traditionally a four-day holiday among the Iraqis, my brigade is actually doubling its patrol schedule and minimizing leaves and passes. The stateside U.S. Army would grind to a halt if that be placed upon them. The troops are eager to learn and incredibly hospitable. They (Iraqi soldiers) have made our sacrifice of yet of deployment absolutely worth the risk and I am proud of the opportunity my team has had to work along side them,” he said.

Stoll added that the projects should be complete early in 2007 and handed-over to the Iraqis at that point.

“We have a great local engineering staff, and that has made things so much better,” he said. “And, quite frankly, it has been r to serve with them.”



An Iraqi laborer puts the finishing touches on a road beir the Iraqi Army base under a construction program by the Army Corps of Engineers and the MiTT from the the 4251 Special Troops Battalion (Airborne), 4th Bde. Combat Te Infantry Division. [USACE PHOTO by Betsy Weiner]

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